

The Hour



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DEATH OF WILLIAM E. DODD

Chairman of American Council Against Nazi Propaganda Was Valiant
and Consistent Foe of Reaction in All Its Manifestations

Dr. William E. Dodd, head of the group responsible for the issuance of The Hour, died at 3:10 in the afternoon of Friday, February 9, at his country home in Round Hill, Virginia. In failing health for more than a year, he was stricken with pneumonia on February 7, and already the next day his condition appeared to be hopeless. He was 70 years old. Widely known as professor of American history at the University of Chicago, he was in the summer of 1933 appointed by President Roosevelt to the post of United States Ambassador to Germany, in which capacity he served until December, 1937. Both in Germany and upon his return to this country he was an outstanding critic of the Nazi regime. In January, 1939, he headed the newly formed American Council Against Nazi Propaganda, and he held the chairmanship until the day of his death. The office of the Council sent the following telegram to Mrs. Martha Dodd Stern and Mr. William E. Dodd, Jr., daughter and son of Dr. Dodd:

It is with a sense of real grief that we of the Council staff have learned of your father's death. We feel this not only because of the affection and respect we had for him as a man but also because of our knowledge of the greatness of his contribution to the cause of democracy.

His Work as Social Historian

William Edward Dodd, son of John Dodd and Evelyn Creech Dodd, was born at Clayton, North Carolina, on October 21, 1869. At the age of 27, in 1895, he received his degree of Bachelor of Science from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, whereupon he remained in the school as a member of the faculty, teaching history. He was also a graduate student, and, in 1897, receiving from the Institute his degree of Master of Science, he decided to go abroad to continue his graduate study toward the ultimate degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Forty and fifty years ago Germany was considered by American students and professors as the best place to learn scientific methods of historical research, and so it was for Germany that young Dodd sailed. He remained at the University of



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Leipzig until 1900, in which year he received his degree of Doctor of Philosophy, offering to that school his dissertation Jefferson's Rueckkehr zur Politik, dealing with Thomas Jefferson's return to active political life in 1796 and his struggle against the reactionary Federalists (forerunners of present-day Republicans).

A convinced democrat of the Jeffersonian school, young Dodd quickly won recognition upon his return to America in 1900 as a thoughtful historian who sought in the past, particularly that of the American South, social and economic roots and principles accounting for the ills and triumphs of the present day. His early influence in America's academic circles was exerted through his teaching at Randolph-Macon College from 1900 to 1908; it was also in this period that he published Life of Nathaniel Macon (1903) and Life of Jefferson Davis (1907).

In 1908 he was called to the University of Chicago, where for the next twenty-five years he was to make his greatest contribution to historical research and writing. Hundreds of graduate students passed through his seminars, which were mainly on the evolution and collapse of the Old South as part of America's struggles for democracy. Many of them, dispersing to teach in the colleges and universities throughout the country, spread his interpretation of American history with great enthusiasm. Men and women of "the Dodd school" were becoming an influence in themselves. Dr. Dodd's published works of this phase include Statesmen of the Old South (1911), Expansion and Conflict (1915), The Cotton Kingdom (1919), Woodrow Wilson and His Work (1920), Lincoln or Lee (1928), and The Old South (1937). Only the first volume of the last-named has appeared, further work on the series being interrupted by Dr. Dodd's last illness.

Ambassador of Democracy to the Land of Fascism

The nomination of Dr. Dodd to the post of Ambassador to Germany in the summer of 1933 came as a surprise not only to the public, accustomed to see career diplomats or rich industrialists at such posts, but also to Dr. Dodd and his family. In her book, Through Embassy Eyes, Martha Dodd recalls that at the time they wondered as to President Roosevelt's motives:

Could it have been, we asked ourselves privately, that President Roosevelt wanted to register his belief in the democratic system by sending a representative as unconnected with Fascism as any human could be? -- a man who had been loyal and unwavering in his support of democratic ideals, modest, scholarly, incorruptible politically and financially, a student of the old Germany where freedom was still not an empty slogan?

From the very beginning of his sojourn in Berlin, Dr. Dodd astonished the Nazis and their collaborators from among the old-line high-caste Germans by his refusal to surround himself with pomp, by his insistence on carrying out his duties in a genuinely democratic way. Of yet

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greater discomfort to them proved the openness with which he repeatedly proclaimed his repugnance at the cruelty and repression marking the Nazi dictatorship. Not only did he lodge formal diplomatic protests against the various infringements upon the rights of Americans in Germany, but in public addresses he voiced his attitude toward Nazism as historian and philosopher, an attitude which was always one of strong condemnation. In 1933, a few months after arrival in Berlin, Dr. Dodd delivered a speech in which he drew unflattering parallels between the regime of Hitler and the brutal dictatorships of the ancient Caesars. In 1934, speaking in Bremen, the Ambassador declared that "only neighborly love can save the world now": once more he warned the Germans of the perils of the dictatorship ruling them, and called for a return to Christian ideals. In July, 1935, in a speech delivered in Berlin, he branded mischievous propaganda as "one of the errors of our time." Goebbels took it as a criticism aimed directly at him, and other Nazi leaders too were not far behind in their hatred of the outspoken representative of democracy.

The Nazis made a point of avoiding diplomatic receptions in the American embassy. "In return," Martha Dodd recalls, "we declined many official affairs given by these same Nazis, though we observed as strictly as possible the rules of courtesy and accepted diplomatic etiquette." The State Department backed Dr. Dodd's policy and actions until September, 1937, when the Secretary of State Cordell Hull, against the advice of the Ambassador, decided to send Chargé d'Affaires Prentiss Gilbert as Hitler's guest at the Nazi party congress in Nuremberg. Dr. Dodd protested this step as tending to lend dignity to the barrage of anti-democratic and anti-Semitic speeches usual at the Nazi party congresses. But the British Premier Neville Chamberlain, bent on appeasing Hitler, allowed his Ambassador to go to Nuremberg, the French followed suit, and the U. S. State Department behaved similarly.

Against Reaction at Home

American reactionaries were raising their heads, and Dr. Dodd responded to their machinations with keen indignation. In May, 1937, he wrote a letter to several Senators on the question of the reactionaries' opposition to President Roosevelt's proposed reform of the Supreme Court. In a careful historical analysis and summary he showed the unprincipled selfish designs of those who hampered reforms and progress under the mask of allegiance to the Constitution. The concluding paragraph revealed the plans of a certain American near-billionaire to finance and control an American dictator. When the letter was made public, the press seized upon the paragraph, making much of Dr. Dodd's refusal to name the man.

In other ways, too, Dr. Dodd continued to express his concern with the growing boldness of domestic and foreign malefactors of wealth. Returning to the United States on a leave of absence in the summer of 1937, he lectured at the University of Chicago and to the public at large, everywhere attracting large audiences, and on all occasions reiterating his staunch belief in democracy.

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Despite his renown, he remained modest. Typical of him was a chance meeting on the campus with a graduate student, to whom the Ambassador extended his hand with the unassuming introduction: "Dodd is my name." He would not take it for granted that practically everyone knew who he was.

Resignation and Last Two Years

Dr. Dodd returned to Berlin late in 1937, but it was plain that the relations between him and the Nazis were reaching a breaking point. Thus, his resignation in December, 1937, came as no surprise. At first the Nazis treated his resignation and departure with stony silence, but later their press went to unbelievable extremes in heaping abuse upon him.

The health of both Dr. and Mrs. Dodd suffered as the result of their trying but courageous life and work in Nazi Germany. In the spring of 1938 Mrs. Dodd died of heart failure, and her death was a further blow to Dr. Dodd. Nevertheless, valiantly and at great sacrifice he continued his work of opposition to the dark forces both here and abroad. His chairmanship of the American Council Against Nazi Propaganda was a source of constant inspiration to his associates in the field.

In these days of 1940, when the reactionaries of the South and other American regions, both in Congress and outside, carry on a most vicious campaign against foreign-born, Negroes, and other minorities, it is fitting to recall Dr. Dodd's words pronounced in the course of a lecture delivered seven years ago at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. In the lecture, entitled "Federal Constitution and its Application," he thus characterized the Federalists' attempts of 1796 to violate the Bill of Rights: "The young United States of America enacted alien and sedition laws in harmony with English reactionary policy and contrary to the spirit of both Federal and State constitutions." He concluded with this truly inspiring message-prophecy on the nature of the American world of tomorrow:

It must be a new world, a new attitude toward constitutions and a recognition that privileged groups always work their own ruin, if not regulated by government; and working their own ruin, they work that of their fellows in vast numbers. *** The principle of democracy is as vital today as in 1776.

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